

## **Dreams**

### **An Interview with Derrick Jensen**

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**This is a transcript of an interview recorded on the 13th December 2011 for the site ‘More Thought’ ([www.moretht.blogspot.com](http://www.moretht.blogspot.com))**

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R= Richard Capes

D = Derrick Jensen

***R: Hello. My name is Richard Capes, and this is a [moretht.blogspot.com](http://moretht.blogspot.com) interview with philosopher, teacher and radical activist Derrick Jensen about his book ‘Dreams’.***

***Okay, Derrick, my first question is: What are dreams?***

D: Well, I don’t know. I have my ideas. In some ways, the question, ‘What are dreams?’ gets to the heart of Western versus Indigenous epistemologies or Western versus indigenous world-views. When I was writing the book ‘Dreams’, I couldn’t find any examples of Western analyses of dreams, or interpretations of dreams that took dreams as anything other than, at most, messages from our unconscious. And that pretty much seems to be the prevailing thought in this culture. It’s always seemed clear to me that dreams are messages from someone else, somewhere else, and someplace else. The someone else I call the dreamgiver.

Years ago I asked an Okanagan Indian friend of mine, Jeanette Armstrong, ‘Where do dreams come from?’, and she laughed and said: “Everyone knows the animals give them to us.” A different time I asked my friend Deloria, who was a Dakota man, ‘Where do dreams come from?’, and he said: “The spirits give them to us”. My point is that there’s this huge difference between Western interpretations of it and indigenous interpretations, in terms of – with the Westerners, it’s always coming from us, from inside us.

I didn’t come to this analysis on my own, through reading about indigenous peoples; it was just my experience. For a long time I’ve had experience of what I call leakage, where I might have a dream that makes perfect sense except... I understand all of the dream except for at some point in the dream there is this blue car that almost runs me over – and this is a real example. And I didn’t understand, I’m trying to figure out the dream. And I think, ‘So, okay, the first car I ever owned was blue. So does that have to do when I was 16? No, that doesn’t fit. What else about blue? What else about cars? Have I almost been hit by a car?’ I couldn’t make any sense. And then later on I’m talking to a friend of mine, and it ends up that that day she was almost hit by a blue car, and that

was exactly the image that happened in the dream. That kind of stuff is what happens to me often enough for me that I have a name for it - like I said before: leakage.

It's pretty clear that there's something going on with dreams. So I set out to write this book to try to help flesh out my understanding of our relationship with where dreams come from. It's related to the question of where ideas for writing come from. It's always been clear to me that I have a muse who is external to me, who is someone else.

So, what are dreams? I guess that if I had to put what I believe dreams are, I believe that dreams are messages from others with whom we can and should enter into a relationship. It's kind of hard to just say that out loud within this culture. It's hard to not be classified as a loon or some sort of New Ager. But, if I guess if I had to say, I guess I think dreams come from beings who give them to us.

***R: Why do you think that many people in this culture would consider you a loon for what you believe dreams to be?***

D: A couple of things. One is that... the fundamental difference between Western and indigenous ways of being, as so many indigenous people have said to me, is that, even the most open-minded Westerners generally perceive listening to the natural world as a metaphor, as opposed to the way in which the world really works. Another way to say this is that most Westerners generally perceive the world as consisting of resources to be exploited as opposed to other beings to enter into a relationship with.

It fits within the whole dominant Western paradigm that we would perceive listening to a muse or to a dreamgiver as being crazy because we also don't perceive listening to trees. Here's the thing: the Western culture is so narcissistic that it doesn't accept that anyone but humans has anything to say. There's a long history of this and that's been used to exploit women, children, other races, and other species. There's a great line by this Portuguese explorer, saying about the Africans: "When they speak they fart with their tongues in their mouths". The point is that the Africans didn't speak, according to him, which meant that it was okay to enslave them. The history of Western dominant culture has been increasing narcissism and a decreasing ability to perceive meaning in the real world, in the outer world.

Even if we go back in the Western tradition – only three or four hundred years ago, prior to the so-called Enlightenment, it was commonly perceived that artists would have muses and that we didn't make up our ideas, we didn't make up our poems, our essays, our paintings. Instead they would be given to us by muses. Frankly, a lot of artists still think this. Most of the artists I know believe that their writing comes from somewhere else.

But anyway, back to the point. This movement has been of increasingly removing meaning from the world and that makes the world a lot easier to exploit – until today you can have someone like Richard Dawkins say that, and this is a direct quote: "Science bases its claims to truth on its spectacular ability to make matter and energy jump through hoops on command". And what he's done with that is conflate domination with the ability to know how something is true. You know something is true because you're able to dominate using that method of knowing. That's an absolutely extraordinary statement. And on one level, it's true. I know that science "works" because when I flip on a light, it turns on. But that's one way of knowing, and that's based on the

presumption that everyone else is a slave that you should dominate - that rocks are slaves that you should dominate to turn into copper wiring.

The way to think about this that I think should make this clear to most people is: Let's say that you and I are in the same room. And let's say I have a gun and I point this gun at you and say, "You need to jump through these hoops and you need to do it right now". And you jump through the hoop. Well, what do you know, I'm a genius. I just caused you to jump through hoops on command. If I put a gun on you and I force you to do things, the chances are really good that I'm going to destroy any possibility we have of having a relationship. That one form of knowledge – the ability to exploit, which is one form of knowledge – forecloses other forms of knowledge based on relationship. The same thing happens on a larger scale. It's even worse than that because this attempt to dominate everything is killing the planet, and will effectively end life on Earth. At very best, it's a tremendous dead end.

I've been saying for a long time that Science is an even better method of social control than religion because if I don't believe in Christianity, then I'm just going to be consigned to a hell I don't believe in anyway. But if I don't believe in science, then I must be either crazy or just plain stupid. That's a much stronger method of social control.

I'm not saying, by the way, that the methods of science don't produce information. What I'm saying is that they produce one specific source of information that has ended up being extremely destructive and has foreclosed many other forms of knowledge. An obvious way that it has foreclosed other forms of knowledge – that this culture has foreclosed other forms of knowledge – is that: 'How are we going to know anything at all at this point about passenger pigeons?' They've been exterminated by the dominant culture. They weren't exterminated by science, but they were exterminated by the dominant culture of which science is one manifestation. And that's part of the deal – that science is a form of knowledge, but it's a form of knowledge that is based on a culture that is based systematically on narcissism and on control. So it's no wonder that you would end up with an epistemology where how you know something is true is based on whether you can control it. Because that's what the whole culture has been about from the beginning.

***R: You argue in the book that science is a monotheistic religion. You also say that it is the "logical religious and intellectual heir to Christianity". Could you explain why?***

D: Well, let's begin with the second part of the question first, about how science is the spiritual and intellectual heir to Christianity. Monotheism – the sort of Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam. – One of the things that they've done really well is they have affectively destroyed meaning on the planet. If you have a god who is a distant sky god (as opposed to numerous gods, numerous sorts of beings, who live in the soil, who live in the forest, who are the forest) one of the things you've been able to do is you've been able to remove meaning from the Earth itself. If you put your meaning into a divinity who is a sky god who is a long ways away – that's the really hard part, to remove meaning from soil, to remove meaning from your lover, to remove meaning from salmon, to remove all of the meaning from your neighbours, and put them somewhere really far away. It's much easier after that's been done for science to go ahead and get rid of meaning altogether, to get rid of divinity altogether.

Before scientists argue, "Oh, we're not saying that the world is meaningless". Well, I'm sorry – you can't have mountain-top removal unless you believe fundamentally that those mountains aren't meaningful. You can't bomb the moon unless you believe that the moon is meaningless.

Here's a great example – I just saw this the other day. It made me laugh and also got me really disgusted. Keith Olbermann was asking some astronomer, "Why bother spending gazillions of dollars to go explore Mars, and to try to find out if there's life on Mars?" And the astronomer said, "Well, this will answer the most important question of all, which is, 'Are we all alone?'" I have another question for this guy, which is, 'Are you fucking insane?' Only someone who believes that there is no meaning on life on Earth could ask the question, 'Are we all alone?', because we are surrounded by... You know, three minutes ago, before I came in to turn on the computer, I was out in this shed that I have, and I was moving some pots around and disturbing clusters of harvestmen – daddy long legs. I was feeling really bad about that and trying to get them to re-cluster and all that. But the point is that they have lives that are just as valuable to them as mine is to me. How can he possibly ask, 'Are we all alone?' That's insane. What about octopus? What about salmon? What about red-tailed hawks? What about Kootenai sturgeon? There are all these wonderful, beautiful creatures, but they don't actually exist to this guy, like they don't actually exist to the entire culture.

I just finished writing an essay about how there's a sense in which we actually do live in... I've been saying for years that we don't live in a democracy, corporations control everything, and, yeah, there's a part of that that's true. But there's a sense in which we do live in a democracy. I just wrote this essay, and one of the things I say is that I was thinking about tigers – no, not real tigers, not the tigers being driven extinct, but instead I'm thinking about the Louisiana state tigers football team. They're ranked number one in the United States, and there's going to be this big football game where people spend \$1500 for the cheap tickets, \$5000 for the expensive tickets, and there's going to be millions of people watching on TV, seventy-thousand attending, and they're closing schools. Can you imagine closing schools and getting people to pay money to attend an event having to do with tigers – real tigers? This is down in the Louisiana area. Can you imagine getting people together to do something about Cancer Alley? After all, it's only children dieing of cancer.

My point is that these tigers are more important than the real tigers – to most people in this culture. And my point is that tigers don't have a real meaning for these people, and the Louisiana state tiger football team – they do have meaning for these people. So all the meaning has been systematically reduced down to human creations. The only life that actually exists would be life that this guy would discover somewhere else. Then, of course, the next thing they would attempt to do would be to exploit it. I think about this all the time: What would happen if they were poking around Mars and they found some fluffy creature with big, long floppy ears and buck teeth. They'd go, 'Oh my gosh, we've found life on Mars'. What happens if they find something like that on Earth? They put them in vivisection labs and test cosmetics on them.

So: How is science a religion? Sam Harris has said that there is no knowledge outside science. That's really just another way of saying what the Catholic church used to say – that there is no salvation outside the church. My point is that it's really a monotheistic perspective – a perspective where there can only be one lens through which you perceive the world.

I said that when I asked Jeanette Armstrong, "Where do dreams come from?", she said they come from animals, and when I asked my friend Deloria, he said they come from the spirits. I asked them about that difference in response and he (Deloria) started laughing and said, 'Well, of course, she'd say that, because she lives in the Pacific North-West, where the land-base is much different, and so your entire cosmology has to be different'. The cosmology has to be different because you have all of these creatures who are trying to impinge on you at all moments – impinge on you

psychically, where you walk through a forest and there's the energy of all the different trees. On the plains it'd be entirely different, where you have only a few megafauna and lots and lots of grass, which would have an entirely different form of life.

Well, that's one way it's really a religion or even a cult – that it can allow no one to believe anything else other than it. Everyone has to become a particular member of that particular cult. It can brook no heresies whatsoever. Sure, it can brook heresies within science – there are arguments within science. But that's really no different than arguments within Christianity. In our standard discourse, we don't allow for the possibility for a land-based religion. I think about this all the time when I see some debate between Richard Dawkins and a fundamentalist Christian, Richard Dawkins and a Catholic or Episcopalian or something. They're saying either God or no God. They're not talking about gods. They're not talking about a religion where you are embedded in your land and you actually listen to what the land has to say.

***R: In the chapter, 'How do we know?', you write: "All perceptions of reality are and must be self-referential". Could you explain what you mean by this?***

***D:*** What I mean is that I can only know what I know. And what I know is that I'm holding my hands up in front of my face, and I'm now moving my fingers. That's what I know. One of the things that science keeps saying is that they don't want to have faith. But what I'm trying to say is that everything requires faith, because I don't actually know that you exist. You know, you're a voice coming out of the computer. It takes a small amount of faith - I do believe you're actually a real person there. But let's think about that for a second here. I believe you're a real person, even though I've never actually seen you. I've just heard this voice coming out of the computer. But, on the other hand, I actually saw those harvestmen a few minutes ago. Yet most people in this culture wouldn't believe that they actually subjectively exist. I mean one of my neighbours used to spray them with poison all of the time for no particular reason - they don't do anything. He just didn't like their clusters. And to do that you have to fundamentally not believe that they don't subjectively exist on some level. You couldn't poison an entire community for no reason unless you don't believe they have fundamental subjective existence. And he saw them!

It gets deeper in that so far as science goes, they don't actually know how electricity works. There are all sorts of theories. They don't even know how gravity works. I'm not saying I don't believe in gravity, obviously. What I'm saying is that even their theories on gravity require a certain amount of faith. Before people freak out at this too much – this is also fundamentally Descartes "I think, therefore I am". He was trying to find something for which he didn't have faith. And the thing is, he chooses something different from what I do. He chooses thought. And what I've said in other of my books is, "Why didn't he say: I love therefore I am". Or, "I defecate therefore I am". I choose embodied existence as the basis of my faith – that I am a being who requires water. Without water I die. That doesn't require a lot of faith. It requires a little faith because I've never died of not drinking water. But I know that there are others who have died of not drinking water. That's the start. Or I know that I need clean air. If I walk into a really smog filled area, I know I cough. It doesn't take faith to know that I require clean air. I know it doesn't take faith to know that if I drink water contaminated with gasoline, it tastes really foul.

Here's the bottom line. The world is more complex than we think and it's more complex than we can think, which means that it requires some faith – that we need to fill in the blanks with one story or another. We can't see everything and know everything. That's just the wet dream of a Christian God. And that's another way that science is like Christianity – in that they want to get to this

omniscience, and they want to get to omnipotence. That's all science is attempting to do is to become as God. That's part of the problem. At least with the monotheistic religions there is this notion that there is something more important than humans, and there is someone who knows more than humans. Science doesn't allow that. Science wants to know everything and to be as God. It wants to control everything and to be as God. All I'm saying is that all ways of life, including science, require faith. The world is more complex than we can ever even imagine. So we have to fill in the blanks with our stories. Different stories can fill in the blanks more or less accurately, and different stories can fill in the blanks more or less destructively.

One of the things I say in the book is that Richard Dawkins says that the way you know something is true is whether you can cause it to jump through hoops on command. But I would say that the way you know something is true is whether you can live with it in place for twelve thousand years as the indigenous did where I live now – the Tolowa. One of the reasons the Tolowa did not invent backhoes is not because they were too stupid, but part of it is they didn't have this progressive mythology. They had a cyclical mythology. They didn't need to create a distant sky god, and they didn't need to create technologies because they were satisfied with the way they lived. The way they lived was working for twelve thousand years. If the way you live is working, you don't need to change it. You don't need to have this restlessness.

***R: Are you saying that science is inherently bad?***

D: I'm saying the information that comes from science can be useful. But I'm saying that science is fundamentally flawed and also fundamentally pornographic in that it is based on an unbridgeable subject-object distinction. The fundamental premise of science is that objects exist who are not wilful and can be described through equations. This is a really problematical and false assumption because it seems clear to me that the world consists of wilful subjects. And if the world consists of wilful subjects then much of science falls apart. I'm not saying that of you throw a rock, you can't describe its arc mathematically.

And people will say, "Well, then, gosh, rocks aren't sentient, because you throw them and they don't have any choice". The truth is, you could throw a human being and they would still describe an arc. It doesn't mean they're not wilful; it's just that if you put them in a catapult and shoot them, they're pretty much out of control. But that doesn't alter the fact that you have then thrown a wilful subject. And that's a fundamental flaw in the entire scientific perspective – to believe at this point an almost entirely unexamined premise that the world consists of objects to be described mathematically, as opposed to subjects. One of the reasons this is really crucial is because the managerial ethos really suffuses this entire culture. So they believe that they can manage a river. But a river is a living being. A river has desires all its own. As soon as you believe you can manage a river or manage a forest – what you're doing is you are... And the same thing happened with human resource management – what it's doing is resourcifying, turning the entire world into commodities, including human beings. And that is a tremendously harmful way to look at the world. It's a tremendously destructive way to look at the world.

There's a great line by a Canadian lumberman: "When I look at trees, I see dollar bills". And if when you look at trees, you see dollar bills, or you see board feet of timber, you're going to treat them one way. If you see trees, you'll treat them another way. If I look at this particular tree and see this particular tree, I'll treat it differently still. The same thing is true for human beings. If when I look at human beings, I see human resources, I see workers, then I'm going to treat them one way. If I look at human beings and see human beings, I'll treat them another way. If when I look at

women, I see orifices, I'm going to treat them one way. If when I look at women, I see women, I'll see them one way. And this is absolutely crucial. And one of the things that science does that is really, incredibly harmful – is it reinforces the notion that the world consists of resources to be exploited, as opposed to other beings to enter into a relationship with. That's absolutely horrendous and harmful. It's like Vine Deloria says: "If we're to survive, then all of Christianity and most of science have to go."

Once again, I'm not saying that science does not produce results that are useful. And I'm not saying science does not describe some things. But what I'm saying is that if you perceive the world through a scientific lens, it can be very easy to objectify the entire world, which is incredibly harmful. And science reinforces an objectified perspective.

**R: Besides dreams and science, another topic you explore in the book is Civilization, which you argue must be brought down. Could you explain why?**

D: It's killing the planet, for one thing, and it has been for the last six-thousand years, or ten-thousand years. One of the first written myths of this culture is Choga Mish deforesting the plains of Iraq to build great cities. Prior to that, Iraq was cedar forests so thick that sunlight never touched the ground. The Near East was heavily forested. Greece was heavily forested. North Africa was heavily forested. This culture destroys land-bases. That's what any culture based on overshoot does.

Another way to look at this is: Any way of life that's not based on the use of non-renewable resources won't last. It doesn't take anybody but a rocket scientist to figure that out. If you have a finite amount of something, you're going to run out. And, likewise, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that any way of life that's based on the use of hyper-exploiting renewable resources won't last. When the Europeans first arrived where I am here, there were Salmon runs so thick that people were afraid to put their boats in the water for fear that they would capsize. They were so thick that they would keep people awake at night with the slapping of their tails. Nowadays, the salmon are almost gone. The dominant culture has been here for over one-hundred-and-eighty years and it's trashed the place. And this is what it does everywhere.

The UK used to be heavily forested and used to have wolves. For crying out loud they used to have hippos in the Thames. We can't blame capital 'C' Civilization for that. We can blame agriculture for that because some of the people on the British Isles developed agriculture without the civilization – they were the ones who wiped out the hippos.

Anyway, so one of the reasons it's important is because it's killing the planet. Without a planet, you don't have life. Another reason it's important is because it's based on systematic genocide too. It keeps conquering more places. How many hunter-gatherer cultures are left? Prior to the beginnings of the dominant culture there were, I don't know what, ten-, fifty-thousand, a hundred-thousand culture across the planet, and it's basically reduced them all to one – first through Christianity, first through the Abrahamic religions, and now through science. And basically the religion that underlies all of those, by the way, is patriarchy, which we can get into or not.

But: Why is this important? Because 90% of all the fish in the oceans are gone. Because oysters in the Pacific Ocean are having reproductive failure because the oceans are siltifying [?]. They're already having reproductive failure. And, by the way, all the news articles that you read about this – the only thing they talk about this makes a hardship for oyster farmers, because oyster farmers

now have to raise the babies in tanks and put them in the ocean. They don't give a shit about the wild oysters or wild molluscs at all. They don't enter the equation. That's the narcissism that's central to the entire culture, and that's central to science. Who gets to observe? Who is the observer and who is the observed in science? How would scientists like it if orangutans began kidnapping scientists and trying to teach the scientists orangutan language? How would they feel about that? Would they think that that's an okay scientific mission? No, they would try to free the captives.

The reason that civilization needs to be brought down is because it's incompatible with life. Anybody who doesn't understand that at this point is really not paying attention. They talk about wind energy, for example, as being this great saviour, but mining for the rare earths is creating these huge toxic areas all over China. You can't take more than what the land gives willingly. It's not sustainable on that level. There are so many levels upon which it is simply not sustainable. It's also not just. It won't last.

***R: Would you like to see humans return to a hunter-gatherer existence?***

D: The only way of living that has ever been sustainable – truly sustainable – has been hunter-gatherer. And we will be living sustainably one day as hunter-gatherers or we won't be living at all. There has never been an agricultural society that is sustainable. We can fantasise all we want about all sorts of magical industrial gizmos, but it doesn't alter the fact that they have never been sustainable, and they never will be sustainable on a functional level, on a level of resource movement. People talk about how they can make cities sustainable. Where do you get the wiring for the electricity? Well, that means you need mines, which means you need to have sacrifice areas. Where do you get the water for New York City? Where does the waste go? On a straight, physical level, they cannot be sustainable.

And an agricultural way of life can also not be sustainable. Iraq was called the Fertile Crescent. It sure as hell isn't called that now. Systematically, what agriculture is, is you clear off whoever lives there - the prairie, the forest, it's biotic cleansing - and replace it with one proper human. So one of the problems is that once you've committed yourself to that path, you can grow more humans on that land then by devoting all the energy to humans, but the problem is you're systematically destroying the soil as you do that. And one of the problems is that once you've committed yourself to that path of overshoot, you need to continue to conquer other places or your population will collapse. That's what this culture has committed itself to for a long, long time, and it's reaching the end. We're out of planet.

***R: How do we bring down or dismantle Civilization?***

D: Well, I think that if space aliens had come down and they were systematically deforesting the planet, and they were putting docks in every mother's breast milk, and they were changing the planet, guaranteed to make much of the planet uninhabitable to humans, never mind non-humans, and they were killing the oceans, putting dams up on every river, systematically destroying life on this planet, we would know what to do. We would go after their infrastructure. We would destroy the infrastructure that would allow them to do this.

Every military strategist knows that wars are not won or lost on the battlefield. Wars are usually won by destroying the others' passage to wage war. And the dominant culture is waging war against the planet. We need to destroy the dominant culture's ability to wage war. And the way to



do that is to destroy the industrial infrastructure. I know this sounds crazy, but the only other thing that's more crazy than this is allowing this dominant culture to kill the planet.

It's like when people talk about all these so-called solutions to global warming that are put forward in the mainstream media – what they're attempting to do is take industrial capitalism as a given and the natural world as that which must conform to capitalism. And that's literally insane in terms of being out of touch with physical reality. Without a planet, you don't have any social system whatsoever. My point is that any solution to global warming – any solution to any part of sustainability – has to take the real, physical world as primary and industrial capitalism, or any social system, as secondary. A social system must conform to a land-base. That's why the Tolowa were able to live here for twelve-thousand-five-hundred-years – because their social systems emerged from and were a part of the land-base.

***R: You say in the book that you find ridiculous the idea that there “can or will be some sort of ‘great turning’ or ‘great awakening’ where people simply ‘walk away’ from this culture’s destructive way of living”. Could you explain why?***

D: Well, it's ridiculous on a bunch of levels. One is there's absolutely no evidence for it whatsoever. Carbon emissions were higher this year than they were ever before. The United States government is basically at this point attempting to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency. They've gotten now where they're actually fracking their own water supply. And this addiction is not going to stop.

Lundy Bancroft wrote this pretty interesting book called 'Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men'. And this book is about how abusers oftentimes don't change – they very, very rarely change. It's a cliché, but it's more or less true that addicts don't change until they hit rock bottom. For the abusers, with the power, they're not the ones who hit bottom. Everybody else, those they abuse, those they steal from, hit rock bottom. So the dominant culture isn't going to change because the dominant culture isn't hitting bottom. The salmon are hitting bottom. The delta smelt are hitting rock bottom. The kootenai sturgeon are hitting rock bottom. The poor of India are hitting rock bottom. The indigenous all around the globe are hitting rock bottom. Everybody else is hitting bottom, but the dominant culture. And they receive tangential benefits for their behaviours. So they're not going to stop.

When environmentalists, for the most part, can't even acknowledge - When they say you can have wind energy, they ignore the effects of wind energy on songbirds and on human beings in China. They're supposed to be advocating for the real world and they don't even advocate for the real world.

I see absolutely no evidence there's going to be a voluntary transformation. And I don't want to stake the life of the planet on something I know is not going to happen. For God's sake, there are seventy-thousand people going to attend the Louisiana state university tigers football game versus Alabama next month, paying \$1500 to \$5000 a piece. Can you imagine that many people attending a benefit for real living tigers? I just don't see it.

***R: What would you say to someone who argued that the dominant culture can't be overthrown without a great awakening taking place - that it's too powerful to be opposed by a relatively small number of people?***

D: The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, M.E.N.D., has been able to shutdown oil output in the Niger Delta by 80%, and oftentimes by 30%, and they've done this through sabotage, through blowing up pipelines, through kidnappings. These people are serious, and the reason they're serious is because their homeland – the largest wetlands in Africa – has been turned into a sludge land. And don't tell me that smaller groups of people can't do this, because I guarantee that the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta, collectively, have fewer resources at the start than you or me personally. But they have been able to reduce oil output by up to 30%, routinely, and in one of their strikes by up to 80%. They have fought against the Elite Nigerian Military and also against Shell's private militias. (And, yes, corporations have private militias – that's how they maintain their land.) And they've won. The thing is they're dead serious and their lives are at stake.

If we had millions of people, we could shut this thing down overnight – just like the French strikes, where they were thinking strategically; they were putting their bodies in front of the oil terminals. And if we had the numbers we could do that easily. But we don't have those numbers. We do have the numbers of men, though; we just need to have the seriousness.

One guy, all by himself almost stopped World War II. George Elser. Have you ever heard of George Elser?

**R: No.**

D: Not many people have. He was a trade unionist who didn't like what Hitler was doing to the trade unions and so he decided to kill him. He got a job at a mine so he could steal some explosives. And he was a watchmaker by trade, I believe, so he made a timing device. He would sneak into this restaurant where Hitler was going to give a speech – for months he snook in and carved out this hole on a pillar, behind the veneer. And then he put the bomb there, set it to go off for 8:20 or 8:40 or whatever, and Hitler normally gave his speech and it would have been right at the end of his speech and would have killed him. But that year, because of fog, Hitler gave his speech at a different time, because he couldn't fly out and he had to go according to train schedules.

The point is that this is 1939 and everybody who's written about German resistance to Hitler knows that if Hitler was dead the war stops. I'm not suggesting, by the way, that assassinations would work now the way they did then. What I'm saying is one person can accomplish a lot with a long lever, and a few people can accomplish a lot if they're dedicated enough.

I was talking to a friend of mine who did great work reporting what was going on in Iraq – in the invasion of Iraq. I once asked him, "So how long would a bridge last in Iraq if it wasn't defended by armed troops?" He said: "Less than 24 hours". That's what a people who are attempting to stop an occupation do. What we need to recognise is that the United States government, the UK government – they're governments of occupation. And we need to take this seriously. We need to transfer our loyalties away from the system and to the land. If our loyalty really is to the land, it really does become a series of pretty straightforward technical tasks, many of which are eminently doable.

One of the things we have to recognise is that there will be a majority of people who will not give up the goodies of Empire. So we need to simply destroy the ability of those in power. Here's what I'm talking about: We need to destroy the capacity for the rich to steal from the poor and of the

powerful to destroy the planet. And we're not going to have the majority of Americans or people from the UK on our side for that.

We need to accept that, and we need to take that into our strategy, which is why I co-wrote the book 'Deep Green Resistance' with Eric McBay and Lierre Keith, because it takes the understanding that we will never have a hundred-thousand people who really want to bring down Civilisation, who are at the centre of Empire. We may have five-thousand, and so what do you do? If you have five-thousand people you have a different strategy than if you have a million. It doesn't mean that there is no chance. What this means is that we need to use different strategies.

Gene Sharp has written brilliantly about how to make non-violent revolutions through mass numbers. It's absolutely brilliant. And that's what you can do if you've got the numbers. If you don't have the numbers, then you have to use different tactics.

***R: You suggest in the book and you've suggested elsewhere that few people benefit from living within Civilization. Doesn't this suggest a 'great turning' or 'great awakening' is possible?***

The thing that's made the most sense to me about the problems of the dominant culture is something Jack Forbes wrote about in his book 'Columbus and Other Cannibals', about how the problem is a spiritual illness with a physical vector. If I have the flu and I cough, then I can transmit the flu to you and you can then get flu symptoms. If, on the other hand, I have what he calls the cannibal sickness and if I transmit this cannibal sickness to you, then you can become a cannibal and you have to consume the souls of others in order to survive. It's a spiritual sickness with a physical vector. And really, in many ways, that's the only way I can describe what's going on because they're killing the planet. It's insane.

Even Bill McKibbin all the time says that what he's about is he wants to save Civilization. He says that if global warming keeps happening that it will destroy our way of life. I've talked to him about this. I've e-mailed him about it. He and I e-mailed back and forth about this in a very friendly fashion. I respect so much how hard he works. But I just don't understand how he's trying to save this way of life instead of the planet itself. That boggles my mind when it's so clearly this way of life that's killing the planet.

Sociology and psychology are just not sufficient for me to describe the murder of the actual planet. My point is that I feel like people have this terrible, terrible disease – a spiritual illness – that causes people to no longer act like human beings.

***R: That reminds me of how, in the book, you talk about the dominant culture being a culture of zombies.***

D: Well, yeah. I think that this culture is sort of zombified. I wrote in another book, 'Songs of the Dead', about how – it's pretty interesting – a lot of parasites can dramatically affect the behaviour of their hosts. A really good example is the Lancet River Fluke. It will be in a sheep or a cow, and then the cow poops and poops out eggs; and then snails like to eat the cow poop, and so they eat the poop, and then the egg hatches inside the snail, and then burrows out and is released into the slime. And ants eat the slime. And here's the interesting part: the flukes will then take over the ant's brain. The ant will walk along normally everyday, just do any things, and then, every evening, when it goes to sleep, it climbs up to the top of a blade of grass at night, and then clamps on tight. It does

this so that a cow or sheep will be more likely to eat it. My point is that the fluke affects the behaviour of the ant. And the same thing is true for certain types of parasite that cause fish to swim to the surface and flash their bellies, and that makes them easier to see. And so the seagull or the bird of prey, who is the next host, would then take it over.

The behaviour of people so insane within the dominant culture that that's another thing I've asked: Who's in charge? Who is actually in charge? Because what's happening is not benefiting humanity as a whole. Yeah, humanity is getting greater numbers in the short-term, but it makes no sense.

***R: What would you say to someone who argued that Civilization can't end without mass genocide taking place?***

D: I would say that genocide is currently taking place. Why are hunter-gatherers being driven out of existence? And why are they being driven off their land to make the Belo Monte Dam? What about the genocide against the hammerhead sharks? What about the genocide against migratory songbirds in general? What about the genocide against bats? What about the genocide against amphibians? Why don't they count?

Somebody once asked Noam Chomsky about this. Somebody asked: "Don't you think the natural world has its own needs?" And he said: "What do you mean? Beetles?" "Yes, beetles. That's what I mean. Firefly populations are collapsing right now. What about those genocides?" Part of the problem is that so many people – And don't get me wrong, Chomsky is the gateway radical for so many people. Chomsky's done such amazing work, and I've got so much respect for his positions. He's been so fabulous. He was the one who helped me understand that the United States is an imperialist power. I know – duh, yeah. But I was raised on the standard mythology of this culture. He helped me understand that, and I will be forever grateful to him for that.

Chomsky is not the point. The point is that the people who believe that to stop this culture would cause massive genocide aren't acknowledging: (A) that humans have overshoot carrying capacity; (B) that genocide is already happening against traditional indigenous peoples all over the planet; (C) that the dominant culture requires the exploitation of the poor (you can't have high-speed rail without having mines; and high-speed rail requires a lot of iron, for example – and one of the primary sources of iron in the United States is Brazil). With this way of life you can't have a city without a countryside to exploit.

Every cell in my body wants for there to be a voluntary transformation where we have a smooth and smart reduction in human population and in technology. But I don't see it happening. And don't blame me because the dominant culture has overshoot carrying capacity. Don't blame me simply because I'm telling the truth that all of us understand – that we've overshoot carrying capacity. It would be so easy to lower human population without causing any trouble. This happened in Iran, for crying out loud! All they did was change the system of social rewards so that your first child has free healthcare; your second child has free healthcare; your third child – I believe it was the third child; they did this in the 1980s – you no longer get free healthcare for everybody. Also: tax breaks for not having children. Also: Iranian soap operas would have these hunky male characters who would say, 'Hey, I just had a vasectomy'. That's all you need to do is change the social rewards and that would be so easy.

Capitalism – and that's the thing that pisses me off about this – requires an increase in population. I just got this really horrible book the other day sent to me the other day called something like 'The

Population Myth' or something. It's by these Marxists who pretend that... – I understand that oftentimes when people talk about population control they are racist. I'm very, very clear about this – that what's more important is population consumption. But where the people really lost me was when they were buying into the same capitalist myth that – They said the problem is not overpopulation, but that populations in Europe aren't increasing fast enough; populations in Europe have stabilised. It's capitalism that requires growth.

Anyway, my real answer for people who say that bringing down civilization is going to kill a lot of people is, once again, first of all: Which people are you talking about? Are you talking about people in India? I mean, for crying out loud, there are people in India who are starving to death right now because of the global economy. If you destroy the global economy the poor people in India are going to be better off immediately. There are former granaries of India that are now export dog food and tulips to Europe.

Second. The dominant culture cannot last. There will be a crash whether it comes through economic collapse, or whether it comes from peak oil, or whether it comes through brave women and men joining in allegiance with the natural world to bring it down, or it comes through climate change or whatever - it doesn't matter. If your primary concern is for the health and safety of the human beings through the crash, then what you need to do right now is start preparing people for that crash – instead of complaining because I'm talking about the obvious. You start preparing people by making neighbourhood gardens, by teaching people about local edible plants, and making this transformation occur.

***R: My last question is one I meant to ask you earlier, regarding dreams. How do you know you're not projecting meaning into your dreams when you interpret them as meaningful?***

D: Well, I don't, and that's part of what takes faith. I don't know that I'm projecting except that I have had dreams fairly often where I had someone else's dream. Like the thing I mentioned early on about the blue car. There's no way that could have been a projection because everything else in the dream made sense except for that until I talked to my friend later in the day who said that she almost got hit by a blue car. The same thing has happened many, many times.

I've also had any number of sort of precognitive dreams where I'll have a dream that doesn't make any sense until a few days later when some other thing happens that there's no other way I could have known about.

Having said that, once again – I'm very careful all the way throughout the book to... That's why I said everything requires faith. I'm simply trying to be aware that I'm very possibly projecting and in some cases I am projecting. But my point is that those who declare that non-humans aren't sentient are those who declare that dreams don't have meaning. They're projecting at least as much. There's no reason for that to be the default. That's my point. There's no reason for them to take the intellectual high ground and pretend that their way is reasonable.

What I really want people to do regarding dreams is to pay attention to their own dreams and to try to find out if their own dreams resonate with their life. And also to open up to the real world. Don't take my word for it. Don't say trees talk because Derrick says so. Take walks through forests, and don't just take one walk through a forest. In the forest here, which I talked about, the trees give me ideas and they give me words for books. I've lived in this forest for twelve years now, which is not that long. It's nothing compared to what Peggy Reeve Sanday was talking about. I've lived here for

twelve years. I take at least three or four walks through this forest everyday. So let's do the math. That's three-hundred-and-sixty-five days a year. That's, say, three walks a day. We'll call it three-hundred days a year... It's fourteen-thousand-four-hundred times a year I walk past these trees.

A lot of the times I'm obviously thinking about something else. A lot of the times I'm paying attention to them. It's that sort of familiarity – Also, I've protected these trees. I've kicked people off who were trying to cut them down. I've done all sorts of other stuff. I have shown myself with my actions willing to be in a relationship with this land and try to do what's best for the land. And the land, in my experience, is responding to that.

So, what I would want people to do is not to go: 'Oh, Derrick says that trees can talk to us, so it must be either true or he's crazy'. But instead walk through a forest fourteen-thousand times and sit next to trees. And talk to trees and see if they say something back. They may, they may not.

One of the things I say all of the time is that people say: 'How do I have interspecies communication?' First off, in human conversations people have mistakes all the time. We have projection all the time in human conversations. Here's a great example – pretty funny. I was doing my laundry at my mom's a few years ago and I was folding my sheets afterwards and my mom said, "Do you want help with that?" That's what she said: "Do you want help folding your sheets?" And what I heard her say, because she's my mom and I've got a whole long history, is: "You're not folding your sheets right". So my mom said, "Would you like help folding your sheets?", and I said, "No!" She was like: 'OK, you're being kind of weird'. My point is that this is a relationship with a human that, at that point, was forty-five years long. And there was still this projection.

This happens all of the time when I enter relationships. One person says to the other: 'I love you', and the other person says: 'Well, I love you too.' And one person means: 'Wow! You sure are a great pal!' And the other person means: 'You know – I want to marry you'. That happens all of the time, so think what can happen with non-humans. And also: Say you're making love with someone, you don't always have to speak with your mouth. You don't have to say: 'Please put this there!'. Sometimes the bodies can speak without language, and sometimes there's projection there too.

But then let's go to non-humans. I always ask people: 'So, have you ever had a dog or a cat friend'. And a lot of them say, "yeah". So how did the animal let you know that it was hungry? 'Well, it looks at the dog dish. It looks at me. It looks at the dog dish, looks at me.' That's a form of communication right there. Of course there's a lot more room for projection – Well, let's back up there a little bit. Let's say I speak English and you speak Swahili. There's going to be a lot of space for a lot of projection in there, but we'll still be able to communicate through some basic human connections – smiling might mean the same thing, whatever.

And let's go to dogs. We still speak mammal, but we don't speak human. And what if you're trying to speak with a lizard? Well, a lizard still speaks animal, but it doesn't speak mammal even. So it's going to be even further away. A lizard might not look at you, look at it's food dish, but that doesn't mean it's not communicating.

That's the fundamental conceit here with the dominant culture: 'It's because they don't speak English, they don't speak. If they don't speak human, they don't speak.' But there's no reason to think that the harvestmen I mentioned earlier in the interview are not speaking and communicating with each other. In fact, when I lifted up the thing that they were on, they all started moving their

legs. That's an alarm signal – they're all telling each other: 'Oh my God, this is terrible. Something bad's happening.'

Trees do this all the time. Trees communicate with each other. If some group of beetles goes after a certain tree, that tree sends out messages. It speaks! Why use that language? Why use the scientific language of mixed chemical pheromones. It speaks! It tells other trees: 'Hey, this is what's going on', and also calls out to ladybugs. I've seen this happen. It's pretty damn cool. I had this tree when I lived in Spokane, Washington – this tree that got this aphid infestation. The aphids were going crazy, killing everything – I mean: killing all of the leaves. And I was like, 'Oh, my gosh! Do I spray it down with water' – I wasn't going to use pesticides. I was thinking about spraying it down with water, but I didn't. I just wanted to watch and see what happened. And about a few weeks later I saw all of these little grubs on the leaf; and I started watching those and they were eating the aphids, and they were ladybug larvae. What happens is - this happens all of the time; this isn't me making it up; this has been scientifically tested – the tree sends out messages that attract the ladybugs and the lady bugs come to eat the aphids. So they're communicating. There's interspecies communication right there.

So that's one of the reasons. How do I know I'm not projecting? Sure, I may very well be projecting. But don't tell me non-humans are not communicating, because that happens all of the time.

***R: Derrick, thanks for talking to me.***

***D:*** Thank you. I think your questions are great.

***'Dreams' is published by Seven Stories Press.***

***The address of Derrick Jensen's website is: [www.derrickjensen.org/](http://www.derrickjensen.org/)***

***This interview was conducted by Richard Capes for the site [moretht.blogspot.com](http://moretht.blogspot.com) and recorded on the 13th December 2011.***

***Thank you for listening.***